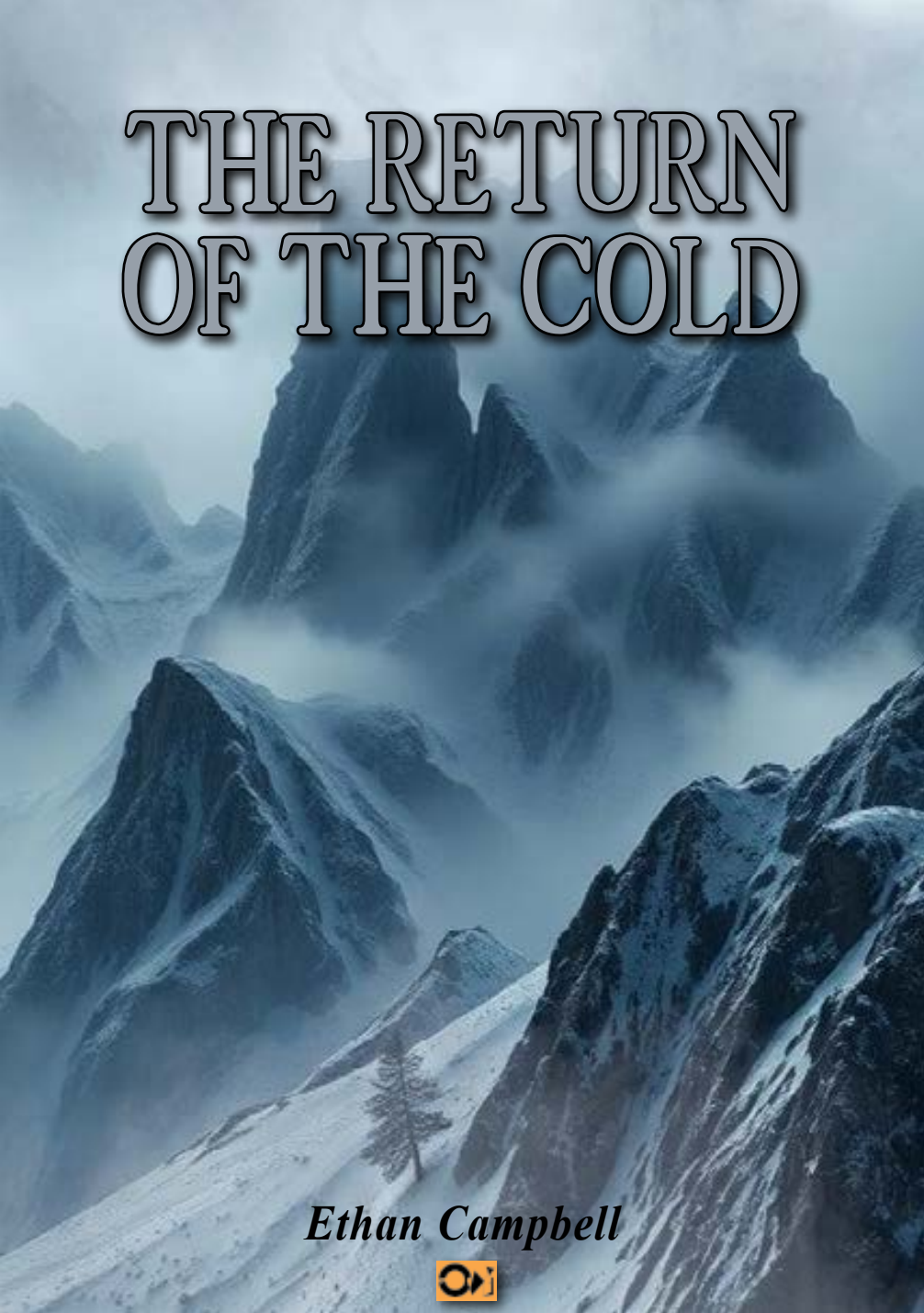
THE RETURN OF THE COLD



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The Return of the Cold

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The winds howled through the jagged peaks of the Carpathian Mountains, a shrieking, unearthly cry that carried with it a suffocating chill, colder than any mortal had ever known. It was a wind that clung to the skin and gnawed at the bones seeping into every crack and crevice, whispering of forgotten horrors. The sky, once clear and bright, had now darkened, the final embers of daylight flickering out like a dying star. Night fell not with the usual stillness, but with a kind of ominous weight, as though the earth itself was holding its breath.

At the base of these ancient mountains, nestled within the crumbling stone walls of a secluded village, an old man sat by the fire. His name was Lorenz, and in his weathered hands he held a tattered journal. Its pages, yellowed with age, had been passed down

through the generations, pages written by those who had sought to learn the truth and had never returned. He had seen the world change around him, but this truth had remained constant, lurking in the shadows of time.

"Do you hear it?" Lorenz muttered to himself, his voice trembling with the weight of memories long buried.

The younger man seated across from him, a scholar named Heinrich, stared into the fire with growing unease. He had been coming to Lorenz for months, seeking answers to the cryptic tales of the mountains, tales that had haunted his nightmares even before he dared to set foot in this forsaken place.

"I hear nothing but the wind," Heinrich said, his voice tinged with scepticism, but the nervous glint in his eyes betrayed him. "You speak of some creature, some… Cold One. But I have seen no proof. Only tales and half-formed legends."

Lorenz's eyes, dark and hollow as if carved from stone, fixed on the young scholar. A chill that was not of the wind settled in the room as he leaned forward, his voice dropping to a whisper that seemed to echo in the thickening darkness.

"The Cold One is real, boy. More real than you could ever imagine," he said, his words carried by the force of an unseen terror. "It is not a thing of flesh and bone, not as you or I. It is a force of nature, a being born of winter itself, a creature older than the mountains, older than the earth. And it has lain in wait beneath the ice for centuries, waiting for the right moment to return."

Heinrich scoffed nervously, though his skin prickled under Lorenz's penetrating gaze. "But it was hunted, wasn't it? By those who came before us?"

Lorenz nodded grimly, his gnarled fingers turning the pages of the journal with a practiced, almost reverent slowness. The words upon the brittle parchment seemed to tremble under his touch, as if the very air around them could sense the ancient horror contained within.

"Yes," Lorenz whispered, "it was hunted. For generations, men have tried to kill it, to seal it away. But the Cold One cannot be destroyed. You cannot kill what is not alive, what exists in the very fabric of the world itself. They thought they had trapped it, buried it beneath the ice, but that is a foolish belief. The Cold One does not die. It waits. It always waits."

The fire crackled in the hearth, casting flickering shadows across the room. Outside, the wind picked up, howling louder now, its wail sharp and relentless. The night had deepened, and the stars above the mountains were obscured by an unnatural, suffocating fog.

Heinrich's heart quickened. A feeling, dark and cold, crept over him, seeping into his bones as if the very air itself had thickened. "And now? What has awakened it?"

Lorenz closed the journal with a shudder, the worn leather cover creaking in protest, and looked out the window. The wind was no longer a mere noise, it was a presence, an ancient, whispering voice that seemed to speak in tongues not meant for human ears.

"The winds have shifted," Lorenz said quietly. "There is a change in the air, something darker than winter. It stirs again, Heinrich. It smells the blood of the foolish. And now, it will have its revenge."

Heinrich stood up, his face pale, his hand trembling as he reached for his coat. "This is madness. I don't believe..."

But Lorenz's voice stopped him, a cold finality to the words.

"You will, Heinrich," he said, his gaze hollow, distant. "You will believe soon enough. And then… it will be too late."

Suddenly, a strange noise pierced the air, a sound so unnatural that it made the hair on the back of Heinrich's neck stand on end. It came from deep within the mountains, far off but unmistakable, a low, guttural rumbling, like the earth itself was groaning in pain. The wind shifted again, a deep and almost mournful howl, as if the very heavens were trembling.

Heinrich's breath caught in his throat. "What… what is that sound?"

Lorenz rose slowly from his chair, his face ashen, his eyes wide with terror. "It's happening," he whispered, as if speaking the words could make them real. "It is waking up."

The door to the small cottage creaked open, and the temperature in the room dropped sharply. The wind howled through the crack, as though it had broken through the very walls of their sanctuary. The

fire flickered, its flames wavering like ghosts before the bitter frost that had begun to creep inside.

From the darkness outside came a figure, a shadow, taller than any man, moving with an unnatural grace, its form obscured by a swirling mass of snow and ice. As it drew closer, the very earth beneath it seemed to groan in protest, the mountains themselves rebelling at its return.

Heinrich stumbled backward, his voice cracking in fear. "No… this can't be real. This can't—"

Lorenz grabbed him by the arm, his grip like iron. "It is real," he hissed. "And it is coming for us."

The door slammed open, revealing the thing outside, an unnatural being of swirling ice and shadow, its eyes glowing a pale, unnatural blue, burning with ancient, unfathomable hatred.

The Cold One had returned.

It moved with a sound like the breaking of glaciers, its long, twisting limbs encased in frost, each step leaving behind a trail of freezing mist that turned the ground beneath it to solid ice. The very air crackled with its presence, an aura of sheer, unrelenting cold

that seemed to drain the warmth from the world itself.

Lorenz looked at Heinrich one last time, his expression filled with sorrow.

"You should have listened," he said, his voice barely audible over the howling winds. "Now, we are all doomed."

And as the Cold One stepped into the threshold, filling the room with an inescapable chill, Heinrich understood, there was no escaping the horrors that had been unleashed.

No mortal hand could stop what had already been set in motion.

And the Cold One… the Cold One would never rest.

I. The First Mark

The bitter cold of the Carpathian Mountains gripped Samuel Dunwich like a vice, each gust of wind sharper than a blade, each flake of snow a tiny dagger against the skin. He could feel the ice in his bones, the numbing chill creeping into his very soul, yet he stood unwavering, his gaze fixed upon the ancient map that had led him and his crew to this forsaken place. The map, worn and frayed from years of use, was the only link to a legend so terrible it had been buried beneath layers of time, myth, and fear. Samuel had come to find it, not to debunk it, as he had once promised himself, but to prove it true, no matter the cost.

And now, standing at the edge of an ancient ruin, half-buried, forsaken, and yet inexplicably untouched

by time, he could feel something in the air. It was as if the very earth had shuddered at their arrival. The mountain range, once steeped in legend, now felt alive with something older, something darker.

"We're here," Samuel said, his voice harsh against the wind, yet carrying an edge of excitement that none of his companions dared to voice. He motioned to the others, who had huddled together for warmth, each of them a mix of doubt, fear, and expectation.

Jon, the youngest of the crew, barely out of his twenties, was the first to speak. His face was pale, the harsh wind already beginning to freeze his breath in the air. "There's nothing but snow, Samuel. You sure this is the place?" His voice trembled, whether from the cold or from the tension in the air, Samuel could not tell.

"Yes," Samuel replied, his words cutting through the doubt with finality. He turned the map over, letting the fragile parchment flutter in the wind before it fell, half-torn, against his legs. "This is it. The creature's tomb. The one written of in the old texts, hidden by the ancients for reasons we may never understand."

A shudder rippled through the group. Even the bravest among them had heard the stories, the tales

passed down through whispered legends, recounting the existence of a terrible being. A creature not of flesh, but of cold. A being that had been hunted and buried by men long since forgotten, and for good reason.

There was a palpable tension in the air now. The sort of tension that hung in the quiet after a storm, when nature itself seemed to hold its breath.

And then, as if the mountain itself were answering Samuel's call, the ground trembled ever so slightly, and a low, hum-like vibration thrummed beneath their feet. It was barely noticeable, like the pulse of some unseen thing, but it was enough to make each man freeze in place. Their eyes darted nervously to each other, their breath caught in their throats. The sound was not of wind or ice; it was something else. Something… alive.

Jon, his eyes wide and frantic, stepped back from the group. "I don't like this. I feel it, something's wrong. We shouldn't be here."

Samuel, a sceptic by nature but driven by a need for truth that bordered on obsession, paid no mind to the boy's fear. His own heart thudded in his chest, but not from fear. No, it was the thrill of discovery,

the exhilarating sense that he was on the verge of something grand, something that had not seen the light of day for centuries.

"We're already here, Jon," Samuel said, his voice clipped. "We've come too far to turn back now. Get inside. We're about to witness history."

And so, against the growing unease in his crew, he led the way toward the ancient structure. It was like no ruin any of them had seen before. The stone walls were jagged, shaped in ways that made no sense, as though the earth itself had birthed them from some unknown abyss. Strange symbols—too old for any of them to recognize, were carved into the surfaces. They twisted in on themselves, like frozen words that could never be read. The markings were not merely decorative; they felt like warnings ...warnings that had been ignored for far too long.

The entrance loomed ahead, dark and foreboding, as if inviting them in with a cruel promise. The temperature had dropped to a terrifying low, far colder than it should have been even in the heart of winter, and the snow that fell around them was thick and oppressive, stifling all sound save for the howl of the wind.

Samuel reached for the stone door, his gloved fingers brushing against the surface. As soon as his touch made contact, the vibration beneath the ground intensified. The low hum now reverberated through the stones of the building, seeming to pulse with an ancient, malevolent energy. The air was thick with an almost tangible presence, as though the very world around them had become too heavy to breathe in.

"Samuel..." Jon's voice faltered as his gaze shifted to the entrance. His eyes were wide with fear, his body trembling as he stared into the dark threshold. "I... I don't think this is a tomb. It's a prison."

The words hung in the air like a curse. For a moment, no one spoke, each man locked in his own thoughts, each one realizing too late that they had crossed a line. Samuel's pulse quickened, but he could not and would not turn back. He stepped forward, pushing the door open with a force that belied the trembling of his hands.

The door creaked, the sound screeching through the stillness like the scream of a tortured soul. When it finally opened fully, the darkness inside seemed to breathe in tandem with the rest of the mountain, exhaling an icy wind that struck them like a slap.

Samuel could hear his own breath, harsh and uneven in his chest.

"We enter now," he said, his voice barely above a whisper, though he could not tell if the words were meant for his crew or for himself.

Inside, the air was impossibly cold. The walls of the chamber stretched upward, their tops vanishing into a shroud of shadow, and the floor was slick with ice, glistening faintly under the weak light that trickled in from outside. Strange symbols were carved into the very floor, patterns that seemed to move if one stared at them too long, like the squirming of insects beneath the ice. And then, in the center of the room, something far more dreadful awaited them.

At first, it was difficult to make out, just a dark mass, half-covered in snow and frost, its edges blurred by the thick, swirling cold. But as Samuel stepped further into the chamber, the sight became clearer. The shape ....so massive it nearly filled the entire space, seemed to be suspended in the center of the room. It was a towering figure, something that seemed to be part of the stone itself, as though it had grown from the very earth. Its form was not quite human, nor was it fully a creature of any kind that Samuel could identify. It was a thing of jagged ice and unyielding frost, a

monstrosity forged by some malevolent force older than the world itself.

And from within the frozen shell, there came a sound.

A low, guttural growl, like the rumble of an avalanche, echoed through the chamber.

The creature was stirring.

The air grew colder still, until it was unbearable. And then the lights, the flickering, dying lights that had once bathed the chamber, snuffed out entirely, leaving them in total darkness.

For a long moment, the only sound that could be heard was their own ragged breathing, the frantic beating of their hearts. Then, from the darkness, a voice, a whisper, barely audible, yet unmistakable.

"You should not have come."

And with that, the darkness surged forward, and all that Samuel Dunwich had ever believed in was shattered by the nightmare that had awakened.

II. The Awakening

The darkness inside the tomb swallowed them whole. Even the faint light from their lanterns seemed to shrink, as if the shadows themselves were drawn to it, eager to devour any semblance of warmth or hope. Samuel Dunwich took a steadying breath, though his chest felt as though it were being crushed by the weight of the air around him. It was not the claustrophobia of stone, nor the tight corridors that had been carved by hands unknown. It was something else, a presence, an energy that hummed in the air like a forgotten scream from the distant past.

"Stay close," Samuel murmured, his voice barely audible, his words swallowed by the tomb's oppressive silence. He did not want to disturb what lay ahead,

not yet. Not until they had uncovered what had been buried for so long.

The tunnel before them twisted unnaturally, as though the earth itself had bent to some terrible will. The walls were slick with moisture, the air thick with an ancient chill that sank deep into their bones. Even Jon, the youngest of the group, who had insisted on joining the expedition with a brash confidence that now seemed to betray him, shuddered and muttered under his breath.

"This is wrong. It feels wrong," Jon said, his voice cracking in the dark.

Samuel shot him a quick, sharp look but said nothing. His eyes remained fixed on the path ahead, as if the answers were waiting for him at the end of this forsaken trail. It was almost as if they were being drawn forward, pulled by an invisible thread by the lure of a terrible truth.

They reached the central chamber with no incident. The walls stretched high above them, their surfaces etched with symbols too worn and cryptic to be read by any man living, the designs so twisted they seemed to writhe in the faint flicker of their lanterns. The air grew colder still, a biting frost that stung their exposed skin.

But it was the sight in the center of the room that caught their collective breath and halted them in their tracks.

Before them stood a massive sarcophagus, an impossibility in this place, so far from the freezing lands where such things belonged. The stone was almost entirely hidden beneath a layer of ice that seemed to gleam with a light of its own, slick and unnatural, reflecting the flickering lanterns with an eerie glow. The ice clung to the stone as if it were alive, as if it had always been part of the tomb.

"Do you see it?" Jon whispered, his voice trembling now, no longer filled with the bravado he had brought from the outside world.

Samuel nodded but said nothing. His eyes were fixed on the sarcophagus, on the way the ice seemed to pulse, as if responding to his very presence. It was then that he noticed the markings etched deep into the surface ...strange, jagged runes that seemed to shimmer and shift in ways that no human carving should. It was as if they had been made by forces older than any known civilization, forces so incomprehensible that no mere man could hope to understand them.

"This... this doesn't feel right," Jon muttered again, taking a step back, his wide eyes darting to the shadows in the corners of the room. He seemed to be searching for an escape, but there was none. The door through which they had entered had vanished beneath a thick veil of frost, sealing them within this chamber of death.

Samuel's breath hitched, but he forced it down. This was it. The creature. The legend. The thing that had been buried here for countless millennia, waiting. Waiting for them.

"It's here. This is it," Samuel breathed, his voice barely a whisper, filled with a mixture of awe and dread.

He had read the ancient texts. He had studied the forbidden scrolls. The legends of The Cold One were scattered across forgotten civilizations, mentioned in fragmented fragments of mythology and whispered in hushed tones. A being of ice, forged in the primordial dark, a creature bound by forces no mortal could understand. It was said to have been hunted by those who feared its power, locked away in a tomb where it could never escape.

But Samuel had always thought it was a myth. Just like the others.

Now, with his heart pounding in his chest, he realized with a sickening certainty that the myth had been real all along.

With trembling hands, he reached out to touch the ice. It was slick and smooth, as if it were a thing of glass. The moment his fingers brushed against it, an icy jolt shot through his body, numbing him to the core. His breath caught in his throat, the frost seeping into his very marrow. His heart seemed to falter, and for a moment, he thought he might collapse right then and there.

But it was only the beginning.

A low rumbling sound, deep and primal, began to vibrate through the stone beneath their feet. The air thickened with an oppressive force, and Samuel could feel the ground tremble, as if something, something immense and terrible, was awakening from its slumber.

"Run!" Jon screamed, his voice cracking with sheer terror.

But it was too late.

The ground beneath them shook violently, throwing them off balance. The walls of the tomb groaned as if they were alive, and a deafening crack split the air.

Ice shattered in a cascade of deadly shards, and from within the sarcophagus, a surge of frost poured forth, creeping across the floor like a tidal wave.

The men tried to flee, but their legs froze in place, as if the very air had turned against them. Samuel's breath froze in the air, turning to vapour with each frantic gasp. His heart raced, but no matter how hard he tried to move, his body would not obey.

And then, with a final, earth-shattering crack, the tomb exploded in a torrent of ice and frost. The figure emerged from the sarcophagus, its form monstrous, its very presence an abomination against nature.

It was shifting, fluid, impossible, a mass of jagged ice and frosted tendrils that seemed to writhe and undulate like some ancient, cursed thing. The air around it seemed to distort, twisting into shapes too terrible to comprehend. The creature's eyes—or what could be called eyes, were glowing a chilling, electric blue, their gaze burning with hatred and a hunger so deep that it seemed to pierce the soul.

The Cold One had returned. Its long, skeletal arms reached out, the ice cracking and groaning as it moved, pulling itself from its icy prison with a force

that could tear the world apart.

"No! No, this can't be!" Samuel gasped, his mind reeling. The sight before him was beyond comprehension, beyond human understanding.

Jon stumbled back, his feet frozen to the ground as he screamed, but his voice was drowned by the terrible, throbbing hum that filled the room, the sound of something ancient, something unfathomable.

The creature surged forward with a terrifying speed, its limbs sweeping through the air like a storm of frozen death. The cold filled every corner of the tomb, suffocating them, freezing them, as though the creature itself was feeding on the warmth of their bodies.

Samuel tried to move, tried to scream, but his voice was lost in the roar of the tomb, in the crash of the ice as it enveloped everything.

And then, with a deafening silence, the creature spoke.

"You should not have come," it whispered, its voice a thousand years of hatred and rage.

And then the tomb went dark.

III. The Hunt

The air in the chamber was suffocating, an unnatural chill that cut deeper than bone, freezing the breath in Samuel's chest before it could even form. His heart thudded wildly, each beat a desperate plea for escape, but the world around him seemed to move in slow motion, as though time itself had been altered by the terrible presence that filled the room.

Samuel could barely stand. His legs felt as though they were made of stone, the weight of the creature's gaze anchoring him in place. Every inch of his skin screamed with cold, yet it was not just the freezing air that pressed upon him; it was the soul-wrenching weight of the thing itself. The Cold One had awoken,

and with it, the world seemed to bend and groan under its presence.

The creature's form, a mass of shifting ice and dark shadows, pulsed with an energy so ancient that it made the very earth beneath him feel like a distant memory. It seemed to ripple and contort, as if its body could never settle into any single shape, as though its very existence defied the laws of nature. It was more than a creature; it was an aberration, a being of pure hatred and hunger, born from the darkness before time itself.

The men who had come with him were no longer men. They were statues, frozen figures of terror, their eyes wide and unblinking, their mouths open in silent screams. The chill that radiated from the Cold One had seized them, stilled them in an eternal moment of fear. Samuel could only look on in horror, his own body trembling, refusing to obey his frantic mind's commands to flee.

"Please… please," Samuel whispered, his voice little more than a rasp, but the words hung in the air like fragile glass, too weak to pierce the oppressive cold.

The Cold One did not respond. It did not need to. Its mere presence was a statement, an ancient declaration that would not be denied.

With a low, hissing sound, like the sibilant whisper of a thousand forgotten tongues, the creature extended one of its elongated arms, fingers like jagged shards of ice. It reached toward the nearest man, Jon, the youngest of the group, the one who had dared to believe he could escape the grasp of myth.

Samuel's breath caught in his throat as he watched, helpless, as the creature's hand closed around Jon. The young man's body was lifted from the ground, suspended by a force unseen, and in an instant, the air grew colder still. A snap of icy energy coursed through the room, and Jon's body froze—encased in solid ice, his features locked in a grimace of pain and fear.

A sound, half growl, half roar, ripped through the tomb. The ice surrounding Jon shattered into a thousand pieces, the fragments spinning outward like deadly shrapnel. His body broke into jagged bits, the pieces scattering across the cold stone floor. Samuel's blood ran cold as he watched the remains of his friend lie in frozen fragments, glistening in the dim light like cruel mockeries of life.

"No!" Samuel screamed, his voice rising above the silence, but even his scream was drowned in the hiss of the creature's presence. His limbs felt like lead, and

he could barely move, let alone run. But the primal instinct for survival surged in him, and he turned, fleeing blindly down the winding corridors of the tomb.

Behind him, the unmistakable crackling of ice shattered the stillness. The Cold One was pursuing him, moving faster than any man should, its presence growing closer, filling the narrow halls with the gnawing, oppressive cold. It was a predator—and Samuel was its prey.

His breaths came in ragged gasps as he stumbled forward, slipping on the frost-coated stone beneath him, but he couldn't stop. He couldn't let the Cold One catch him. He couldn't let the thing that had slaughtered Jon, slaughtered them all, claim him next.

The walls around him seemed to close in, narrowing the passageway, tightening with every step. He turned another corner, his lantern flickering wildly, casting long, grotesque shadows that danced on the walls like mocking phantoms. The frost crept closer, crawling along the stone, filling the air with an unbearable pressure. It was as though the tomb itself had become a living thing, closing in to trap him.

And then, just as he thought he might reach the end of the labyrinth, the ground beneath him shifted.

He stopped dead in his tracks, staring ahead.

There, at the end of the corridor, stood the Cold One. Its form was now fully realized, more solid than before, as though it had taken shape from the very frost and shadows around it. Its eyes, if they could be called eyes, glowed with an unholy blue fire, burning with ancient rage. The air itself seemed to recoil from its gaze, a distant wail emanating from the very walls as if the tomb itself recognized the creature.

Samuel's breath caught in his chest as he backed away, his heart hammering in his chest like a caged animal.

"No…" he gasped, his voice barely a whisper, but the Cold One heard him. It always heard.

The creature raised its arm, and in an instant, Samuel felt it, an unbearable cold that rushed through him like a thousand sharp needles. His breath froze in his lungs. He couldn't move. He couldn't speak. His mind screamed, but his body was unresponsive, locked in place by the force of the Cold One's presence.

Samuel was no longer a man. He was nothing more than a living statue, frozen in place by the icy grasp of something beyond comprehension. The cold seeped deeper into him, an ancient, terrible thing that sought to tear him apart, piece by piece.

The Cold One's eyes narrowed, and Samuel felt the weight of its gaze settle upon him like a vice. He could hear the creature's voice now, not words, but a presence in his mind, an echo of something older than the stars themselves.

"Forgive me," Samuel gasped, his voice barely a breath of air against the crushing weight of the creature's will.

But the Cold One did not forgive. The Cold One did not answer.

With a flick of its hand, the room seemed to shudder. The ice in the air began to coalesce, swirling into a vortex of freezing death. The walls cracked as the frost expanded, and in the center of the room, where Samuel stood paralyzed, the creature loomed like a god of vengeance, its icy form towering above him.

And in that moment, Samuel knew. The Cold One

had come for vengeance. It had come for them all, for those who had dared to disturb its ancient slumber, to awaken it from the tomb that had been its prison for millennia.

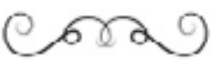
The tomb had been sealed for a reason.

And they had awakened it.

In the final, frozen moment, Samuel could see nothing but the Cold One's eyes, those eyes that burned with eternal hatred.

And then, there was nothing. Only the biting cold. Only the darkness.

And the whispers in the air, echoing forever in the tomb.



IV. The Last Dawn

The sky above the mountain village had not seen light for days, perhaps longer. The sun, once a beacon of warmth and life, had vanished beneath an oppressive, endless gray. What remained of the world was encased in a relentless frost, a frozen wasteland where even time seemed to have been silenced by the terrible presence that now ruled over all. There was no sound, no movement, save for the hollow echoes of the wind, which whispered through the ice-coated trees and over the snow-choked earth.

Samuel stumbled out of the dense thicket of trees that bordered the village, his body covered in the frost and snow that had fallen like a curtain of doom across the land. His mind was a haze, an incoherent whirl

of fragmented thoughts and terror, but beneath the fog, there was a singular, overwhelming realization, he was the last one.

The last survivor.

The Cold One had not spared any of them. His companions, his friends, his fellow hunters, each one was gone, frozen in place by the same icy grip that had claimed so many others before them. The village, once a humble but thriving place, had been transformed into a graveyard of ice, every building and every street now frozen in time, trapped under a layer of frost too thick for even the light of day to pierce.

The houses stood as mere silhouettes in the distance, their roofs bowed with snow, their windows covered by thick layers of ice, as though the village had been abandoned for centuries, instead of days. The cold was absolute, devouring everything it touched.

Samuel felt a tremor run through his body as he approached the village square, his heart heavy with the weight of all he had lost. The memories of the faces he had once known, the sound of children playing in the streets, the warmth of a fire crackling in the hearth, were now distant echoes, like ghosts

calling from another world.

A shadow moved in the distance, and Samuel's breath caught in his throat. He turned sharply, every instinct screaming for him to run, but his feet seemed rooted to the ground. His eyes widened in disbelief. There, in the center of the village square, standing like a dark monument amidst the frost, was the Cold One.

It was no longer the shifting, ethereal horror that had plagued him in the tomb. It had grown, become something far more tangible, its body coalescing into a solid, terrible form. It was as though the very elements themselves had conspired to give it shape, for its body was composed of jagged spikes of ice, gleaming black veins of shadow coursing through it like the blood of some ancient, forgotten god. Its eyes, those eyes that had once burned with otherworldly fire, were now hollow pits of infinite cold, staring down upon him as though it could see all that was within him.

Samuel's heart beat faster, and a cold sweat broke out across his brow. It was not just fear he felt, it was an overwhelming sense of futility, as though he were nothing more than a mote of dust before a storm, about to be swept away without a second thought.

The Cold One did not speak. It did not need to. Its presence was its language, its very being a message that Samuel understood without words. It had come, and it had come for them all. There was no escape, no hope. There was only the inevitable.

"Why?" Samuel whispered, his voice trembling in the wind. "Why did you spare me? Why did you...?"

The Cold One shifted, the ice and shadow swirling in unholy union as it moved closer. It seemed to grow larger, its mass expanding with each step it took, until it loomed over him, its cold breath like the exhalation of a death god.

"You should never have awakened me." The voice was not a sound, but a presence that vibrated through the air, sinking into Samuel's bones, freezing him in place. The words were not spoken in any tongue, but were understood by every fibber of his being, a language beyond comprehension.

The Cold One raised a hand, an enormous, clawed appendage of solid ice and Samuel's vision blurred as his body trembled violently, as though he had been struck by a thousand frigid blows all at once. His muscles locked, his mind screamed, but there was no

escape from the power that was now upon him.

"You believed you could control me. You believed that your arrogance would save you."

Samuel could feel the weight of the creature's disdain pressing down upon him, and with it, the suffocating realization that his fate had been sealed long ago, the moment he had sought to uncover the secrets that should have remained buried.

But the Cold One's words were not filled with anger. There was no malice in its voice—only the weight of inevitable justice. Samuel had become part of a cycle, a cycle that stretched back through the eons, one that had been set in motion long before his village had ever been founded.

"Why destroy us?" Samuel gasped, his voice now barely a whisper. "What did we do to you? What did we..."

But the Cold One did not respond. It did not need to. Its intentions were beyond the comprehension of mere mortals.

Samuel could hear the sound of cracking ice behind him. His body turned involuntarily, and he saw them, the people of the village, those who had once been

his neighbours, his family, his friends. They were not dead, not in the conventional sense, but their bodies had been frozen, suspended in time, caught in the terrible grip of the Cold One's power. They were no longer themselves—only frozen husks of what they once were.

In that instant, the realization hit him harder than any blow. The Cold One had not just come to punish. It had come to erase, to erase all memory of the village, all traces of their existence, to blot out their legacy like a forgotten dream.

And as Samuel stood there, paralyzed by the icy gaze of the creature before him, he understood the final, terrible truth.

The Cold One was not here to destroy their lives. It was here to erase their very memory, to bury their existence beneath the crushing weight of its unrelenting ice. The village would not be remembered. The people would not be mourned. They would be nothing, lost in the frozen void, consumed by the endless night.

And just as Samuel's last shred of hope faded, the ground beneath him cracked open.

The ice split like paper, a jagged chasm opening wide, and Samuel found himself falling, plummeting downward, deeper and deeper into the abyss, into the heart of the mountain, where the Cold One's reign began and where it would never end.

As he fell, he screamed, his voice swallowed by the unrelenting cold, his body torn asunder by the very force of nature that had wrought his doom. His vision blurred as the abyss swallowed him whole, and in the final moments before the darkness consumed him entirely, he saw it, the Cold One, watching him with its unblinking eyes, the eyes of eternity.

And in that last breath, Samuel realized the true horror.

There was no escape.

The Cold One would endure forever.

And nothing would be left to remember them.

THE END

The Return of the Cold

Ethan Campbell

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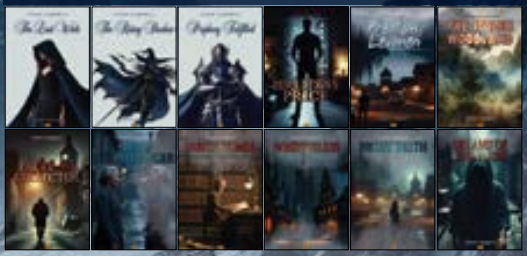
THE RETURN OF THE COLD

Ethan Campbell, natural born stand-up comedian who never made it any further from his toilet's mirror, so he turned into writing fantasy and paranormal stories.



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